

George Washington Campbell to Andrew Jackson, February 6, 1807, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

GEORGE W. CAMPBELL TO JACKSON.

Washington, February 6, 1807.

Dear Sir , Your very much esteemed favour of the 15th. Ult. was recd. by last mail. Its contents have been perused and particularly attended to. The development from time to time of Burr's treasonable project, excited much agitation in the public mind here, since the commencement of the Session. But many of those who knew Burr, were not so much surprised at the *turpitude* or *blackness* , of heart, evidenced by the treasonable project, as they were at the extravagance of it, and the extreme improbability of its being attended with any success. Many persons, (of whom I was one) believed B. capable of committing any crime, however *base* and *detestable* , that can be conceived of by human nature, to aggrandize himself, they believed his heart a composition of *base turpitude* , without a single *atom* of virtue or principle, except personal ambition, and this imbittered by chagrine and disappointment, but they thought he possessed some talents that would have prevented him from making himself the *scoff* and *ridicule* of mankind, by attempting a *mad, extravagant project* , without the probable means of carrying it into effect. This it was that induced a number of the best informed to doubt for some time the reality of that part of his scheme, that contemplated a separation of the western States from the Union. But his views are now ascertained beyond a reasonable doubt. You have seen a developement of them before this time, inclosed in my last to you, which will satisfy your mind on this subject. With regard to the suspicions you notice of your joining Burr etc. being in circulation here. It is true such suspicions were rumoured, for a short time, but the belief of them was confined to such only as did not know you, and who did not inquire of

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those who did know you in order to be informed on this subject. Shortly after my arrival at the City and previous to my first letter to you, I conversed with the President on the subject, he had heard of the suspicions alluded to, he declared his intire disbelief in them and his unshaken and unlimited [c]onfidence in your integrity, and on his mentioning the matter to me, my answer was, that I would as soon suspect myself to be guilty of taking such a part, as I would you, that the thing was incredible, impossible. I saw him, and conversed with him frequently on the subject, since, and his declarations of confidence were uniformly the same, and his convictions of your integrity appeared as strong as mine, or, even *your own* could be. We were at the same time apprehensive that Burr would find means, to lull you into security until you should receive the dispatches from Government, and that he had probably found means to corrupt some post-officer, which might prevent the dispatches being recd. by you in time. For these reasons with others which shall be stated I am strongly induced to believe, and indeed I may say, I am convinced, you have understood the orders of the Secty of war, differently from what he intended you should understand them, or that you gave a meaning to the latter observations, he made in them, which he did not intend to communicate. Since receiving your last (of the 15, ulto.) I called on the President, the conversation turned on the affair of Burr, and he mentioned that he understood, (I presume from the s. of war) that you had taken offence at, or felt yourself injured, by, the manner in which the orders of the S. were written. The Pr. said he had seen the letter, that he could not discover in it, any cause of offence, that the orders were written in direct and posi[ti]ve language, but that this was the usual and formal mode of issuing orders by the Secy. but he added that it was impossible that any improper insinuation or suspicion could have been intended by the S. because he (the P.) had the highest confidence in you which was known to the S., and that on this acct. as well as for the sake of dispatch etc. the orders were directed immediately to you without being transmitted through the executive of the State, who recd. dispatches at the same time. I immediately called on the Se.ty of war, and he mentioned the subject to me himself, stating his surprise at some expressions in one of your letters, which shewed that you were disatisfied at the terms of his orders. He then stated in substance the words of

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his orders, and added the observations he subjoined thereto, relative to the report of your intention to join Burr etc. and that if such suspicion was *afloat*, (not if there was any ground for such suspicion) you might be inabled to strike a more effectual blow, or *words to that effect*. He declared unequivocally, that you must have intirely mistaken his meaning. That so far from entertaining any doubt of your integrity, or any suspicion respecting it, his entire confidence in you induced him to send you, (to use his own words,) a *Blank sheet*, or genl. orders and powers to take such measures as you tho't best to check the conspirators, instead of specifying particular duties for you to perform, and that he added the observation respecting the report of your joining Burr on the same ground of entire confidence, and as he thought as a candid man he ought to do, that you might have the whole case, as report stated it here, before you, and act according to circumstances, not as you intimated to him, that you were to act the *smiling assassin*. no such idea was intended, because it was not believed that you had given any ground for the report of your being concerned with Burr, but that if such report was *afloat*, the conspirators might on that acct. be less on their guard, and thereby inable you to seiz or detect them, and certainly there could be no impropriety in this. You certainly were not bound to give them notice that you were about to arrest them. This statement in substance the S. of war made to me and authorised me to inform you thereof in case I wrote to you, which I promised him I would do. From the whole of this business that has come to my knowledge, I cannot believe the Sec.ty meant any thing in his orders different from what is above stated, but whatever may have been his meaning, his explanations of his own *orders* or *letter*, I presume, in such a case as this, ought to be taken as compleatly satisfactory on that point. Hence I conclude at present you appear to have reasonable grounds to be satisfied, and perhaps in reality the S. of war, may have some reason to consider himself the most injured of the two. This, however, I presum will satisfy you until I see you. . . .